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# LMDA Review, volume 4, issue 1

Gitta Honegger

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## lmda review 4.1 (1992)

# lmda review

literary  
managers  
& dramaturgs  
of the Americas

Vol. 4, No. 1

*At the opening of the school year in 1991, Gitta Honegger presented a few remarks on the subject of Dramaturgy to the incoming Graduate Acting, Directing, Playwriting and Stage Management students of the Yale School of Drama. What follows is a slightly abridged version of her address.*

Despite heroic efforts by the Yale School of Drama which could be said to have introduced the notion of dramaturgy into the American consciousness, first through teaching, then by sending out generations of dramaturgs into the barely budding, soon blossoming and occasionally wilting regional theatre, we have not been able to eliminate the question *What does a dramaturg do?* It has become something like an initiation rite in every incoming class for the dramaturgs to be asked this by their fellow students and friends, their families and of course, again and again, by audiences. It comes almost as a reflex response and it can be annoying particularly, when I catch myself rattling off a series of clichés about what it is I do.

As I was thinking about our perennial topic once again, I wondered what would happen if a director were asked after her show opened: "So, what is it you do?" I quickly realized that actually a lot of people don't know what a director does. And if a playwright does not write within easily identifiable conventions, chances are, she might be asked the same questions. Actually, there might come a time, if it hasn't arrived already, when people might be asking about theatre in general: "What the hell is that?" - Telltale signs are all around.

Dean Stan Wojewodsky has talked

eloquently about "The archeology of the text". The term *archeology* suggests an ancientness that is both reassuring and threatening. Die hard theatre people have been heard to refer to themselves occasionally as the *dinosaurs* vis-a-vis the media transformation of the performing arts into the *entertainment industry*. I sometimes play with the idea that some day soon anthropologists rather than critics will look at our work.....

Perhaps, the general understanding of the dramaturg's function is in direct relationship to the degree of our understanding of theatre as an art form

within a long tradition with a deep connection towards that tradition be it Western or non-Western. And that as an art form, the theatre is part of the historical process. This dynamic of change, or dialectic, needs to be defined, redefined, explored as a continuum - particularly in our culture, which is fundamentally unhistorical. Our idea of progress is discarding everything that has gone on before. That is how the West was won and cultures were destroyed in the process, native as well as immigrant. Disposable diapers.

If we feel that reflecting about history is unnecessary, and not just history in

**E-Mail announcement:** Mark Winchester would like to help spread the news about an e-mail user group listed as SHAKESPER that originates from the University of Toronto. Anyone interested in receiving more information about this subscribing to this service can leave an E-mail inquiry for editor Ken Steele <ksteale@vm.epas.utoronto.ca> or his co-editor, Hardy Cook <hmcCook@boe00.minc.umd.edu>.

Shakespeare offers a 17-megabyte databank of 55 substantive quarto and folio texts of Shakespeare's 38 plays, in addition to several other valuable resources such as member biographies, works in progress, calls for papers, announcements and bulletins, bibliographies, on-line papers, etc. Mark Winchester hasn't had much time to analyze and critique the system, but it seems to have quite a bit to offer. Perhaps this is a model for what LMDA might want to do? For those who are similarly inclined, there are at least a couple of thousand other E-mail discussion lists available on Bitnet, including:

**HUMANIST@Brownvm:** Humanities and humanities computing.  
**FICINO@utoronto:** Reformation and Renaissance Studies.  
**REED-L@utoronto:** Records of Early English Drama project.  
**STAGECRAFT-REQUEST@jaguar.utah.edu:** Stagecraft discussion.  
**THEATRE@grearn:** Theatre discussion.

Anyone who has a university affiliation may be eligible for a low-cost or free E-mail account. Check with your campus resource (here called Academic Computing Services) and get on-line. Would it be possible to compile a directory of LMDA members with E-mail accounts in place? Just a thought.

### PRODUCTION DIARIES PROJECT UPDATE:

Over the past year, the LMDA Production Diaries Project (formerly called the Dramaturg's Log Project) has made considerable progress. The Project Director/Editor, Mark Bly, and Consultants Anne Cattaneo and Don Shewey have moved beyond the planning phase to the actual selection and commissioning of dramaturg diaries or casebooks on two current productions.

The first of these, *The Love Space Demands*, by Ntozake Shange, was produced by the Crossroads Theatre Company of New Jersey early in 1992. Talvin Wilks staged Shange's newest work and dramaturg Shelby Jiggetts was commissioned to create a production diary chronicling the evolution of the piece from its earliest stages to its closing.

The second, the *Clytemnestra* project, is currently in production at the Guthrie Theater in



**President:**  
Anne Cattaneo  
(Lincoln Center Theater)

**Executive-VP:**  
Victoria Abrash  
(Philadelphia Drama Guild)



**VP-Communications:**  
Mark Bly  
(Seattle Rep)

**Secretary:**  
Jim Lewis  
(Guthrie Theater)

**Treasurer:**  
Chiori Miyagawa  
(Arena Stage)



**New Dramaturgs:**  
Susan Bougetz  
(Women's Project)

**Administrator:**  
Emily Morse





Minneapolis. The director, Garland Wright, has combined three Greek tragedies (*Iphigeneia at Aulis* by Euripides, *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, and *Electra* by Sophocles) into a work to be performed over two evenings. In the retelling of Clytemnestra's story, Wright and his collaborators will use translations by three of the Twentieth Century's leading poets: W.S. Merwin, Robert Lowell, and Kenneth McLeish. Guthrie Dramaturg, Jim Lewis, has been commissioned to document the production throughout its development and performance.

We envision that *The Love Space Demands* and *Clytemnestra* project diaries will be published with three other diaries in 1993 as part of a volume that will be the first in an annual series documenting productions of consequence in North and South America. Project Director/Editor, Mark Bly is currently exploring several other potential commissions including: Robert Wilson's production of Buchner's *Danton's Death* at the Alley Theatre, Houston (Fall, 1992); a production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, to be staged by Peter Sellars; and a project to be announced by the Canadian director Robert LePage.

The Production Diaries

terms of politics, but in terms of the human condition, if we think that memory is a nuisance and history is a discardable burden, if we believe that we live in the moment, create in the moment, for the moment, then theatre is just one of many (and usually not the best) entertainments to fill the moment. And dramaturgs are unnecessary. Instead we need play doctors, like businesses need consultants fast experts who fix the trouble for the moment, just as in our lives outside the theatre we need psychoanalysts to help us find a balance and give us support, since we have lost the support system of a larger historical context which can provide us with a perspective that will lead beyond a given moment in time and experience.

At this particular point in the history of the Yale School of Drama it is appropriate to reflect upon change. Within the context of the evolution of theatre, of this particular theatre and of this theatre within the context of the theatre in this country, in the world, and within the history of the theatre. This is the dramaturg's job in an ongoing dialogue with the Artistic Director, which is the dramaturg's primary working relationship.

The history of art, including theatre has taught us that every movement, every style contains a critique of the previous one. That means, it has been made possible by the preceding movement and can only be fully understood within that context. Arthur Danto, the art critic for the Nation, once asked us to imagine Cubism at the beginning of the history of painting. That is, before perspective was invented. It would have just been another approach to non-perspective painting. What makes Cubism exciting is what it is consciously not, i.e. illusionist painting. We can go further and say that what made Cubism possible was illusionist painting. The same applies to the theatre: Neo-Classicism as a critique of Shakespeare, Romanticism being a conscious rejection of Neo-Classicism, Naturalism rejecting the artificiality of what went on before, Brecht rejecting the excesses of German Expressionism and Romanticism, etc. etc.

In our time of *belatedness* - to use a term coined by a famous Yale colleague Harold Bloom, our perception of history is no longer linear. We now have to redefine the idea of perspective, that is, learn to accept many different perspectives from which history is understood and interpreted.

If we look at theatrical styles simultaneously, as planes of color on a canvas, perhaps, we can see how one plane of color next to another plane of color will give it its specific life and luminosity which it wouldn't have in itself. This is what happens in a repertory theatre, a repertoire of plays that, in the long run, illuminate each other, make each other possible. To think about these things is the dramaturg's task. She can provide the map on which to chart the roads to be taken. It's not that any given Artistic Director may not know the same things, but she/he has other considerations to focus on, like a driver who has to deal with the traffic while the person next to her can keep her eye on the map. It's obvious that the same goes for the text in a production. Providing the map facilitates the choices the director, the artistic director have to make.

I have spent this much time emphasizing a sense of history and the importance of an overview, because this is the expertise and the gift the dramaturg has to offer her co-workers in the theatre. If a dramaturg is an "expert" in play analysis, it also means that she has a vast-historic memory. (So, who needs it? Let's get the show on. Let's make it work. Let her lecture in a classroom...). Vis-a-vis a text her historic memory will enable her to make connections between the voice she is hearing in the work and the vast canon of world literature. The writer herself might not be aware of it. But as we know from Jung, there is such a thing as the collective unconscious, something that connects us to all humankind and its history. Accordingly, the dramaturg might uncover values which are not instantly visible on the surface. It is I think what we mean when we say the "archeology of the text". In its newness the un-covered text may impress us as a "foreign language". The dramaturg,

**A FIRST FOR DRAMATURGY.** In March, NBC's series "Empty Nest" featured a character who was a dramaturg. Several members wrote to say they had seen the show, but we had been alerted several months before when an LA-based TV fact checking and research bureau called the office to make sure that the character's name was not the actual name of a working American dramaturg: NBC wanted to make sure they were covered legally and could not be accused of exploiting or defaming anyone.

together with the director, can provide the context within which this language will become understood, without destroying its originality. The term points both back to the source and forward. "Discovery" implies the finding of something that has been there. It's new because we didn't know it was there. Or, we were looking for other things, so we didn't pay attention to it. The danger is to make what may at first sight seem unfamiliar, "familiar".

We often say "we are looking for the new, the interesting voice". We have to be careful here and distinguish between the journalistic understanding of the term and what the dramaturg is after. George Steiner writes in *Real Presences*.

*Serious art, music, writing is not interesting in the sense in which journalism must be .... The appeal of the text, of the work of art or music is, radically, disinterested. Journalism bids us to invest in the bourse of the momentary sensation. Such investments yield "interest" in the most pragmatic sense. The dividends of the aesthetic are, precisely, those of "disinterest", of a rebuke of opportunity. Above all, meaningful art, music, literature are not new, as is, as must strive to be, the news brought by journalism. Originality is antithetical to novelty. The etymology of the word alerts us ....*

Dramaturgs are there to remind all theatre artists of this. In our times this is more necessary than ever. That's not going to make you popular. Everything

#### REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENTS

**Northwest:**  
John Kazanjian  
(New City Theater)  
Mark Bly  
(Seattle Rep)



**Bay Area:**  
James Leverett/Erik Ehn  
(Berkeley Repertory Theater)  
Mark Cuddy  
(Sacramento Theater Co.)  
Joy Carlin  
(A.C.T.)



**Southern California:**  
John Glone  
(South Coast Rep)  
Oskar Eustis/Kathleen Dimmick  
(Mark Taper Forum)  
Norman Frisch  
(L.A. Festival)



**Four Corners:**  
David Jones  
(New Mexico Rep)  
Elizabeth Ramirez  
(Arizona Theater Company)  
Aden Ross  
(Salt Lake Acting Co.)





you are, everything you represent goes against popular mythologies. You'll be marginal. If you want to be popular, become a rock star.

We are, primarily, involved with thoughts. They are not concrete, they can't be touched. As the saying still claims, *they are free*. On the highest ethical level, this should also imply that we *cannot be bought* (which shouldn't be used as an excuse for the fact that we are chronically underpaid). Thoughts are elusive, invisible, therefore they cannot be *destroyed*. They can be repressed, but they cannot be eliminated, as recent world events have proven. Thoughts and thinking people make people nervous. They seem passive. Unproductive. A waste of money. "What is she doing?" just sitting there, during a rehearsal, thinking? Those given to paranoia as many in the theatre are, will feel threatened. "What the hell is going on in her head?"

So, as thinking persons we are already treated with suspicion. The profession has an ugly, foreign sounding name. We are associated with **FOREIGNERS!!!** Some of us, God forbid, *are* foreigners!

Another cliché about people associated with thinking is that they are not usually corporeal, they live in their heads, they are unworlly, unsensual, weird. They're almost expected to be that. And if they aren't, they are even more suspicious. This reminds me of Arthur Danto's comments after finding out from Heidegger's obituary that he was a connoisseur of the finest wines:

*So luxurious and refined a cultivation was hardly to have been expected in one who spoke with solemn and prophetic urgency, of authenticity and anguish, boredom and nothingness, death, being and abandonment. One would have imagined a table talk of that gnomic thinker to have consisted of monosyllables - Sem! Zeit! Nicht! Tot! Raum! - expressing gloomy and shattering profundities, rather than the Gallic frivolities with which the Feinschmecker strives to articulate the nuanced differences between Lafite 57 and Chateau Haute Brion '46.*

Directors, actors take note: Although dramaturgs are often considered the "serious thinkers" in the theatre, they are human, they laugh, they play. Some of their best ideas come when directors engage them, like their actors, playfully. They are not computerized answers for touchtone telephones: For *concept* dial 1, for *cuts* 2....

So what *is* a dramaturg??? So far I've emphasized the two major connections of the dramaturg - to the Artistic Director and to the director. She is also the link between the two. In her working relationship to the director she again becomes the link - the link to the text, to the playwright who provides the

map that will now be transformed into a peopled landscape. The dramaturg connects the map to the landscape in the process of discovery and revision on either side.

Great, the dramaturg is a link. That's something we haven't been called. That'll teach them. Marcel Duchamp speaks of hinges. A hinge, connecting lifeless objects, makes motion possible. Try and explain that to a subscriber!

*Gitta Honegger is the Resident Dramaturg of Yale Repertory Theatre and Associate Professor of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama.*

**NATIONAL THEATER TRANSLATION FUND AWARDS ITS FIRST MAJOR ROUND OF COMMISSIONING GRANTS.** The National Theater Translation Fund is pleased to announce that after reviewing a large group of distinguished submissions, five translators/playwrights have been awarded commissioning grants in the fund's pilot year.

The projects which have been awarded grants represent an impressive range of languages and cultural traditions and support some of America's most distinguished theater translators as well as translators emerging in the field.

Awards were made to the following theater translators: Royston Coppenger for his translation from the French of ROBERTO ZUCCO by Bernard-Marie Koltes; Zara Houshmand for her translation from the Farsi of THE MOON & THE LEOPARD and THE BUTTERFLY by Bijan Mofid; Joanne Pottlitzer for her translation from the Portuguese of NELSON 2 RODRIGUES an adaptation by Antunes Filho of two plays by Nelson Rodrigues: FAMILY ALBUM and ALL NUDDITY WILL BE PUNISHED; J. Ranelli for his translation from the Icelandic of DEVIL'S ISLE by Kjartan Ragnarsson, and Caridad Svich for her translation from the Spanish of HISTORIA DE UNA ESCALERA by Antonio Buero-Vallejo.

The distinguished peer panel for NTTF's initial round of grants was composed of Marguerite Feitlowitz, Michael Henry Heim, Chiori Miyagawa, Ruben Sierra and Shona Tucker who between them speak Czechoslovakian, Danish, German, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Swedish, French, Catalan, Hebrew, Ukrainian and Japanese.

NTTF's first round of grants was announced by Carey Perloff, Artistic Director of CSC Repertory and initiator of NTTF and Anne Cattaneo, President of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas which is administering the grant. Both express their thanks to the Pew Charitable Trusts for making possible the pilot year of the National Theater Translation Fund.

NTTF commissioning grants will be awarded annually. Inquiries for future submissions and other information should be addressed to Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, Box 355 CASTA CUNY Grad Center, 33 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036, (212) 642-2657.

Project has received funding from two sources as a direct result of LMDA President Anne Cattaneo and Don Shewey's concerted efforts. Early in 1992, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas a grant of \$24,000 to be used exclusively over a one year period for the theater documentation project. The Ettinger Foundation has also made a significant contribution by donating \$5,000 to be used during the first year of the project by LMDA.

The Project Director, Mark Bly, is eager to receive suggestions for future productions which deserve to be chronicled. Please send any ideas to him at the following address after July 1st.

Mark Bly  
Yale School of Drama  
222 York Street  
New Haven, CT 06520

#### NEW YORK METROPOLITAN NEW DRAMATURGS MEET THE WOOSTER GROUP

25 New York-based New Dramaturgs joined author and performer Ron Vawter and Wooster Group Dramaturg Marianne Weems on February 9th to see and discuss their new piece ROY COHN/JACK SMITH. Thanks to VP Norman Frisch for making this meeting possible.

#### Homestead States

Paul Walsh  
(S.M.U.)  
Chris Baker  
(Alley Theater)  
Brad Mooy  
(Arkansas Rep)



#### Great Lakes:

Richard Pettengill  
(Goodman Theater)  
Roger Danforth  
(Cleveland Play House)  
Wesley Savick  
(Theater X)



#### Ohio River:

Janet Allen  
(Indiana Rep)  
Michael Bigelow Dixon  
(Actors Theater of Louisville)  
Susan Gregg  
(Repertory Theater of St. Louis)



#### Northeast:

David Kent  
(Merimack Rep)  
Joel Schechter/Gitta Honegger  
(Yale Repertory Theater)  
Melissa Cooper  
(Portland Stage)

**LMDA - DRAMATISTS  
GUILD - SSDEC  
PRESENT  
"PLAYWRIGHTS  
DRAMATURGS AND  
DIRECTORS WORKING  
TOGETHER" AT  
MARYMOUNT THEATRE**

On Feb. 24, the three professional organizations joined to present a symposium on working together as collaborators. Two playwright/dramaturg/director teams discussed their working relationships and answered questions from the audience. Panelists were THE GOOD TIMES ARE KILLING ME's Lynda Barry, Erin Sanders and Mark Brokow (Second Stage Theater) and MAN, WOMAN, AND DINOSAUR's Regina Porter, Tim Sanford and Melia Bensussen (Playwrights Horizons)

**ATTENTION LITERARY MANAGERS AT THEATRES!**

LMDA New Dramaturgs is compiling an updated list of internships that are available to newcomers in the field. If you work at a theatre where there are internships available, or if you know of internships in the field that would be valuable, please take the time to fill out the following information and return it to: Susan Bougetz, New Dramaturgs, c/o LMDA, Box 355 CASTA CUNY Grad Center, 33 W.42nd St., New York, NY 10036. Thank You!

Theatre or organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Internship: \_\_\_\_\_

Duties: \_\_\_\_\_

Time frame: (for the season, six months, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Hours per week: \_\_\_\_\_ Pay/stipend/transportation? \_\_\_\_\_

Contact name at theatre: \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name, address & phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Southeast:**  
Adam Versenyi  
(Playmakers Rep)  
Steve Ramay  
(Florida Studio Theater)  
Del Hamilton  
(Seven Stages)



**Mid-Atlantic:**  
Sydney Mahone  
(Crossroads Theater)  
Rick Davis  
(Center Stage)  
Michael Hollinger  
(Philadelphia Festival for New Plays)



**Canada:**  
Don Kugler  
(Necessary Angels)  
Michael Springate  
(Canada Council)  
Lorraine Herbert  
(C.E.A.D.)



**Metropolitan New York**  
Erin Sanders  
(Second Stage)  
Tim Sanford  
(Playwright Horizons)  
Lynn M. Thomson  
(Circle Repertory Theater)



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